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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000345

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA; APHIS, BANGKOK FOR USAID  
(DR. JOHN MACARTHUR)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [AMED](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [TBIO](#) [CASC](#) [KFLU](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: SUSPECTED AI OUTBREAK AMONG BIRDS IN BURMA

REF: A. TIDWELL - OPS CENTER 03/13/06 TELCON

[1](#)B. RANGOON 259

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: On March 12, GOB officials informed FAO and WHO officials of a suspected outbreak on March 8 of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) at a commercial poultry farm in Mandalay Division. Specimens collected by a joint-ministerial investigation team from Rangoon tested positive for the H5 virus at a Rangoon laboratory on March [1](#)12. The Ministry of Livestock Breeding and Fisheries filed a report with Paris-based OIE (the World Organization for Animal Health) and on March 13 forwarded additional specimens to reference laboratories in Bangkok and Australia for verification. Government officials held separate briefings for WHO and FAO on March 14 to share their latest information. Embassy Rangoon EAC met to discuss the latest developments and review preparations. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) FAO and WHO contacts in Rangoon confirmed on March 13 that an outbreak of suspected HPAI occurred at a commercial poultry farm in Mandalay Division on March 8. According to a report by MLF officials, 112 birds of 780 on a commercial poultry farm in Aung Myae Thar Zan Township died. Authorities destroyed the remaining 668 birds. The Central Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Rangoon made the preliminary H5 diagnosis on March 12. The GOB immediately reported the outbreak to OIE and sent specimens to reference laboratories in Thailand and Australia for verification on March 13.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Following media reports on Sunday night, March 12 of a possible HPAI outbreak in Mandalay (ref A), poloff tried to contact POCs in the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MLF) and the Ministry of Health (MOH). Key contacts had already left for Mandalay Division to research the case.

[1](#)4. (SBU) MOH and MLF officials briefed local WHO and FAO representatives on March 14. Dr. Tin Win Maung, Director General of the Department of Health, told WHO that there were no human AI cases, but the MOH would increase surveillance efforts among human populations living near the outbreak area. A reliable embassy contact at the Mandalay General Hospital claims the hospital has admitted three persons for observation. All three lived near the outbreak area and displayed flu-like symptoms. A joint MLF-MOH investigation team of 10 persons continues to follow up on outbreak developments in Mandalay (ref B).

[1](#)5. (SBU) According to WHO sources, FAO Bangkok received the specimens from Burma at noon on March 14. The delay in transporting the specimens was due to GOB export requirements. FAO told WHO that test results should be available on March 15.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Embassy EAC met on March 14 to review the situation and mission precautions. The EAC agreed to hold a briefing for FSNs and a town hall meeting for the U.S. community on March 15; to continue to meet WHO and FAO officials for daily updates; and to consult regularly with CDC, USAID, and RMO in Bangkok for additional guidance.

[1](#)7. (SBU) COMMENT: We expected HPAI to surface in Burma, since it has also appeared among birds in neighboring countries. We find encouraging the Burmese officials' openness in reporting the outbreak to international organizations and working with them to address the issue. The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, the Ministry of Health, WHO, and FAO in Burma all lack skilled epidemiologists and equipment required to test viruses quickly and to protect personnel exposed to HPAI-infected animals. In this particular area, the GOB is proving very receptive to U.S. technical advice. If we are able to assist with some of these urgent needs, we may also be able to play a role in preventing its further spread. END COMMENT.  
VILLAROSA